



BUDGET COMMITTEE



Judd Gregg, Ranking Member
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Sen. Gregg's Opening Statement at Hearing on Senate Procedures for Consideration of the Budget Resolution/Reconciliation February 12, 2009 (unofficial transcript)

It's always a pleasure to have the President Pro Tempore here, today or any day. Senator Byrd is the oracle of the Senate on the issue of rules, procedure and proper decorum. All of us have read much of his writings and enjoyed listening to his presentations on the floor and we will today.

The issue of vote-o-rama is difficult and there is no clear answer to it. The vote-o-rama is the Senate's equivalent to Chinese water torture, especially for those of us who manage the bill on the floor. But on the other hand, it is the opportunity for the minority to make its points. We have seen in recent years where the minority has lost its capacity to make its points in the traditional way on the Senate floor. We've had a number of cloture petitions and tree-filling events.

And so the budget rules, as they are apparently structured, make it really the absolute last bastion of the right of the minority to bring forward its opinions and have a vote on them without being able to be shut off. Granted, the debate on the amendments is extremely truncated, as the Chairman said, it's a minute on each side. But the right, at least, still exists.

Now, I want to express my great appreciation to Senator Reid for the way he's run the Senate so far in this session. It's been open, it's the way it used to be, it's the way it should be and it's been enjoyable. It's been just plain enjoyable to have the Senate function as a house of debate and a place where people get their points across on the floor and get to vote on it. And I hope we can maintain that approach and I admire his leadership this year on that issue.

But I don't know that the minority is going to be willing, and the Chairman hasn't implied that this would be his purpose, but the minority isn't going to be willing to neutralize or significantly adjust its rights here if it would affect the ability to make our points. And so we have to come up with a procedure which addresses the rights of the minority and at the same time gets into a more orderly process at the end of the day when we get to the final hour of the budget.

That's what we're looking for, and if there were a quick answer, we would have it by now. But we don't, so the ideas that the Chairman has suggested in his four points are I think worth discussing and seeing if we can work them out.

But at the end of the day, the bottom line for us is going to be that people in the minority -- we hope we won't be in the minority forever; we'll have to give the opportunity back to the Senator from North Dakota at some point -- the people in the minority will have the ability in the budget process to amend without any limitation that is unreasonable and that the rights of the minority will not therefore be curtailed. But that doesn't mean we can't in some way fix the vote-o-rama. I do believe there must be something better. So let's take a look and see if we can find it. Thank you.

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